

## Will Dreams be the New Front in Fighting Terrorism?

By Daniel Oldis

*Inception*, Christopher Nolan's reality-bending movie where dreams and dreams within dreams create interlocking levels of fantasy has yet to be followed by a sequel. One of the many rumored sequel storylines focuses on the U.S. Military. The basic plotline: the military fights sleeping terrorists by invading their dreams and "extracting" secrets from the enemy. Though an intriguing concept (and Edward Snowden's worse nightmare), it's a far cry from the existential narrative of Nolan's ingenious film.

Is such a military-based plotline forthcoming? No one knows with any certainty if *Inception 2* will see the inside of an IMAX theater. However, as far as dream "extraction" goes, current technology is potentially capable of recording the subconscious experiences of dreams (1) and allowing military interrogators to "watch and listen" to the dreams of terrorists, dreams that may contain hints of plots, associates and hidden bases. Our dreams may be bizarre when we attempt to reconstruct and recollect them, but most dreams reflect recent life events (2). The names, faces and settings from dreams often correlate to real people and locations. Together with intelligence gathered from other sources, dream extraction may help form a general picture of interest for intelligence analysts.

Using technologies such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electromyography (EMG), researchers in America and Japan have been able to record basic dream imagery, dream speech activity and dream motor behavior (walking, hand movements, etc.). Recently, recording dreams and mental imagery has gained attention when Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook revealed a keen interest in the idea. (3)

These technologies may prove to be an effective passive (though certainly psychologically invasive) interrogation technique and an alternative to extreme and unreliable methods such as waterboarding. And with dream extraction, there is no long interrogation period—terrorists will fall asleep at some point even if they resist for a day or two.

What intel might be gained from dream recording? And more importantly, what information could it reveal? Let's look at one of the three modes of recording (i.e. imagery, speech and motor behavior): speech—talking in dreams. Using EMG sensors placed on various muscles involved in speech production, dream talking and dream conversations are decoded. We have two suspects, both recorded for several dream intervals for several nights. While dreaming, one of the suspects is recorded as having a high probability of uttering "Go . . . Kathmandu" (to be precise, dream recording is based on probabilities of dream experience, not literal recording like a home movie). Lower probabilities of decoding may be "cat can do", "catch my dew," etc. But combined with the word "go," Kathmandu may be a good candidate. Now if the intelligence analyst has data from other sources or other dream recordings that suggest Kathmandu is a place of interest, the analyst may triangulate intel and then pack 007 off to Kathmandu.

When interviewed for this article, retired General Warren (Bud) Nelson commented, "I think this [dream recording] could be a powerful technique for intelligence gathering. Enemies and terrorists often effectively resist interrogation and should they finally break, often lie. Strong-willed suspects have control over what they reveal. During sleep and when dreaming, they are no longer in control and may reveal useful information."

Yet an unnamed, retired member of the intelligence community struck a more cautious note in an interview: “Unwilling subjects make reliable access to the dream state problematic at best. If a person knows someone is trying to access their dream state they will be able to put up psychological barriers that at a minimum, would make accurate interpretation next to impossible. In the event the technology develops a credible tool, able to covertly tap into an individuals' dream state, it would be possible to gather intelligence. Still, it would be framed by the psychological profile of the individual.”

In fact, the U.S. government may already be testing the dark waters of dream extraction: some development on the required technologies has been done at NASA. Moreover, DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) is a sponsor of C-lab, a polymath consulting and research firm whose projects include “manipulating subjects' sleep content while they nap, testing our ability to alter the course of events in dreams.” Sound a bit like *Inception*? (4)

The potential use of dreams and dream technologies by the military to make the world safer poses risks as well as rewards. If subconscious interrogation becomes commonplace and dream extraction technology continues to evolve, it can knock on anyone's door. Our intelligence source noted, “When one believes they are acting for the greater good, true or not, it's possible to justify any action, even accessing someone's subconscious against their will, even if it circumvents the Constitution. The military would likely view the metaphysical as outside the scope of the Constitution. But violating the dream state is more egregious than busting down a door without a warrant.”

Ultimately, extracted dreams become information to be deciphered and utilized as any revealed information with equal potential for useful and insidious applications.

#### References:

(1) “Can We Turn Our Dreams Into Watchable Movies?” by Daniel Oldis; *The Huffington Post*, Feb 4, 2016

(2) *Dream Reader: Contemporary Approaches to the Understanding of Dreams* by Anthony Shafton; SUNY Press, 1995

(3) “Zuckerberg says technology to record your dreams is possible” by Rob Jackson; Phandroid, Dec 2, 2012

(4) “This Scientist's Ability to Hack Your Dreams May Be the Stuff of Nightmares” by James Holbrooks; [undergroundreporter.org](http://undergroundreporter.org), June 6, 2016